

REPLY BY THE PRESIDENT OF SOUTH AFRICA, THABO MBEKI, TO THE TOAST REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, THE PRESIDENT OF THE HELLENIC REPUBLIC, CONSTANTINOS STEPHANOPOULOS AT THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE, ATHENS, GREECE: 24 FEBRUARY 2005.

Your Excellency, President Stephanopoulos,
Honourable Prime Minister, Kostas Karamanlis,
Honourable Ministers,
Honourable Speaker of Parliament, Anna Psarouda-Benaki,
Honourable Mayor of Athens, Dora Bakoyannis,
Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Kalispera sas! Good evening.

My entire delegation and I are truly delighted to have accepted your invitation to visit the Hellenic Republic. On behalf of the government and people of South Africa, I convey our warmest greetings to you, your government and the wonderful people of the Hellenic Republic.

It gives us great pleasure to join you tonight in the historic city of Athens. It was here, many centuries ago, that the spirit and ethos of democracy and organised society, in which all people share equally, was born.

And so it is fitting that, in our own celebrations of freedom and democracy, we also remember those gone before us, our friends who have stood besides us, with unflinching conviction, during the many years of our struggle for freedom.

On behalf of the government and people of South Africa, I wish to take this opportunity to convey our sincere thanks and appreciation to the Government and people of the Hellenic Republic for their support during the difficult period of fighting against apartheid.

Our countries share the noble values and ideals of democracy, justice, peace and security, the rule of law and the recognition that we cannot sit idle while many of our fellow citizens the world over, live in abject poverty, in conditions of hunger, instability and injustice.

We have taken important steps for the development of our continent, through our continental programme, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which is our practical plan for the renaissance of our countries and continent.

In this regard, your support in creating a climate to complement our own efforts will be critical. We are very pleased that during your Presidency of the EU you fostered

closer relation between Europe and Africa advocating for more support for the development of the African continent.

We also recognise the constructive role the Hellenic Republic is playing in your region. Indeed, we believe, as you do, Your Excellency, that stability is a prerequisite for development and prosperity.

Your Excellency, we are encouraged that the relations between our respective nations continue to prosper in a number of strategic and mutually beneficial areas. In this regard, we are grateful that our two countries were able to sign the trade agreement last year, further cementing the good relations between our two countries.

A practical demonstration of this is the fact that our bilateral trade has increased substantially since 1994 and is poised to even grow to higher levels. Because of this potential of the ever-expanding economic relations, businesspeople from our respective countries are forging closer ties and I am confident concluding business deals that will benefit our economies. In this visit, Your Excellency, we have indeed brought a large business delegation to engage with their counterparts in the Hellenic Republic.

Your Excellency, as you step down from office, we wish you well in your retirement and hope that you will grace our shores again in a more relaxed atmosphere so that you would have the opportunity to see the beauty of our land. I also promise that when time allows I will also come back here to explore more of this home of democracy so as to better appreciate the glorious gift you have given to humanity.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please rise and join me in a toast to the good health and prosperity of His Excellency, President Constantinos Stephanopoulos and to the continued good relations and friendship between the peoples of the Hellenic Republic and South Africa.

To our friendship!
Thank you.